



SOME FEW
REFLECTIONS, &c.



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REFLECTIONS ON

THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF THE

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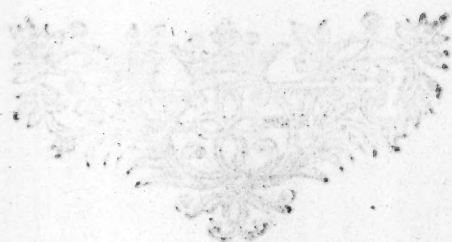
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REFLECTIONS
ON THE
TRAGEDY
OF
BOADICIA.



L O N D O N :

Printed for M. COOPER at the *Globe* in *Pater-*
noster Row. MDCCLIII.

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LONDON:
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SOME FEW
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A S the new tragedy of Boadicia is formed in a very different taste from the generality of modern plays, so it has had as singular an effect upon the audience.

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Without the amusement of an intangled plot, or the ornament of splendid descriptions patched on, as Horace has expressed it, for shew only, or eloquent speeches adorned with studied metaphors, similies, or other trappings of rhetoric, it has universally engaged the spectators to the utmost attention; while many seem at a loss afterwards to account for the influence it has had upon them. But all embarrassment of this kind must have arisen from comparing the present tragedy with the productions of others, instead of examining it solely by the original, which all pretend to copy, real life and manners: for here the author has carefully avoided every extraneous embellishment, and wholly engaged himself in imitating after the justest manner human actions and passions. The true merit therefore of this performance is to be estimated in
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proportion, as the personages are made to speak and act, as men would actually do in the same circumstances. And in this he has so happily succeeded, that no one misses those super-numerary ornaments of language and eloquence, which, though common and usually admired, are as unnatural in dramatic dialogue, as they would appear in the discourses of men engaged in affairs, wherein their lives, and all that was dear to them, depended. But many seem surprized at not finding a plot more diversified with a variety of incidents and turns of fortune, that might of themselves have composed a more entertaining story. But though excellent tragedies have been framed upon plots of this kind, yet the principal intention in these compositions may be easily obstructed, if not quite frustrated, by such busy and entangled scenes. For

if the memory is too much employed in retaining and keeping together the various occurrences of a compound fable, the attention to the sentiments and characters represented must be greatly diverted.

To judge of the merit of any plot upon just principles, it is necessary to consider, wherein the chief excellence of dramatic writings consists. This is certainly in drawing real pictures of human life, and such as may convey instruction, whether in comedy by ridiculing folly, or representing an amiable conduct in private life; or in tragedy by exciting compassion, and a due estimate of the uncertainty of human, felicity by representations of the evils and calamities, that life is subject to. Therefore the true merit of any plot consists in its conducing to this purpose.

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Aristotle divides the fable of these poems into two kinds, the simple and the implex; by the first of these meaning an action, that goes on by a regular course of events orderly pointing towards the same conclusion; by the other, where incidents intervene of a contrary kind, that in the course of the action give delusive expectations of a different result from what the whole at last terminates in; or, at least, bring about the event intended by accidental and unexpected means.

This latter form is preferred by Aristotle, and in regard to the story itself is certainly more amusing at the first representation, by the curiosity, that will naturally arise in the spectator's mind to see how perplexities of

this kind shall be at last unravelled: for this natural curiosity will even lead men through the tedious tale of a long extended romance, though employed only in the absurd adventures of giants, magicians, and knight-errants. But as the whole merit of such artificial stories is no other than affording exercise for the thoughts in an indolent hour, this is of too trifling a nature to make any considerable part of the excellence of the sublime species of writings now under consideration.

And, on the other hand, the simple fable is the more natural; for it is scarce possible to bring together the variety of incidental occurrences necessary to an implex fable, however within the bounds of possibility, so as not to come short of that

that degree of probability, which without difficulty may be preserved in plots of a more simple structure. To instance in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* of Sophocles, in what degree is it probable, that Oedipus at the point of time represented in this play should be so little instructed, as he seems to be, in the circumstances reported of the murder of Laius, to whom he had succeeded in his kingdom by marrying his queen Jocasta? or that the shepherd employed to expose Oedipus, should not only have been of the retinue of Laius, when he was killed, but the single person, who then escaped with his life; and that at the very instant, he comes into the city to discourse with Oedipus, a messenger should arrive from Corinth, with notice that the king of that city was dead, and that Oedipus was appointed in his room;

and that this messenger should be the very man, to whom the other had, for the preservation of Oedipus contrary to his instructions, delivered the infant?

Though in regard to the great design of tragedy, both kinds of fable are equally useful: for some passions and tempers shew themselves in contending with a continued and uninterrupted series of misfortunes, and other emotions of mind are excited by the surprize of unexpected casualties and disappointments.

The plan of the present tragedy is of the simple kind, not without action, though without intricacies and bustle. Its excellence consists in the distinct representation of the effects, the story, in its several circumstances has upon the personages concerned

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according to their different situations in regard to the event, and the particular turn allotted to the mind and temper of each; and is formed upon the model, Aristotle recommends above all others, where the catastrophe is brought about, not merely by the course of human affairs, but by some error in great and worthy characters. The gross indignities, Boadicea had received, must justify the highest resentment, and the vigour and resolution she exerted in retorting the injury, was an act of great magnanimity; tho' sullied by the cruelties exercised in the pursuit of her revenge. But the suffering her just anger to arise to a rage absolutely implacable, and the artless manner of opposing the violence of her passion, which the open and generous temper of the rough, but honest Dumnorix betrays him into, produce

a contest, upon which the whole event turns.

Nothing sure can be imagined more natural and just, than the scene, where this fatal discord is represented. But tho' Dumnorix here appears as an excellent pattern of equity and moderation, as well as of resolution and fortitude; yet the humane part of his character wanted farther illustration. For this is introduced the character of Venusia, the sister of Boadicia, though of an opposite disposition. And perhaps, we have here as beautiful, and amiable a picture of a female mind, as has ever been described; possessed of discernment to see her husband's high merit, with a temper disposing her to a suitable love and reverence for him. And in the return, Dumnorix makes
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to this goodness, he discovers a warmth and tenderness of affection no way inconsistent with the firmness of his mind, but a great ornament to it.

That plot, which administers occasion for scenes, which open to view such amiable minds and dispositions, can never justly be excepted against. Nay, that simplicity, which in itself may be considered as less entertaining, secretly contributes to heighten the effects of such interesting scenes, by leaving the mind disengaged to give its whole attention to them. And that the effect of those scenes should have been as great, as has been experienced in the singular attention, which has been constantly given in the representation of this play, is nothing surprising. Can any one doubt,

doubt, that a picture would not strongly touch the mind of every spectator, which should represent, for example, that instant in the last scene between Dumnorix and Venusia, when she first experiences the operation of the poison, she had taken, and should express the agony of mind, which seizes Dumnorix upon that occasion, with the complacency, the dying Venusia feels upon that testimony of his affection? Much less therefore, can the whole scenes, which display at large the various emotions in the mind of each through their intire progress upon this affecting occurrence, fail of exciting in the spectators the tenderest compassion; and commanding the highest attention: where we see the manly soul of Dumnorix, though prepared to support with the greatest intrepidity his own dignity under the

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the most adverse stroke of fortune, struggling with his affectionate sollicitude for Venusia, how to lead her into a resolution so difficult, however necessary, for her soft and gentle spirit to take; and behold the art, with which he conveys his sentiments to her by such gradual intimations, as he finds her tenderness capable, without too great disturbance, of receiving; and at the same time see the female softness of Venusia labouring to flatter her timidity, and seeking to frame imaginary arguments of hope from the very circumstances, that lead to despair, till at last she yields to the authority of her beloved Dumnox, and supported by him, receives her fate with becoming composure.

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If these few thoughts upon this excellent tragedy, should in the least contribute to improve the pleasure of any, who see, or read it, I shall not repent of having thus thrown them together.

H. P.

Dec. 8. 1753.

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